

**GREATER MANCHESTER DRAMA FEDERATION  
3 ACT PLAY FESTIVAL 2018/19**

<b>Society</b>	CHADS
<b>Title</b>	The Thrill of Love
<b>Author</b>	Amanda Whittington
<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	Wednesday 30 <sup>th</sup> January 2019 at 7:45pm
<b>Venue</b>	CHADS Theatre
<b>Contact/host name</b>	Hamish Lawson
<b>Contact on the night</b>	David Quaife
<b>Young actors in cast?</b>	No
<b>Licence available</b>	Yes

**Production highlights:**

Some nice performances from a committed cast

Good pace and appropriate emotion

Good technical support

**To think about for the future:**

Creating more intimate settings for certain scenes

## THE PRODUCTION

*Adjudicator writes and identifies themes, challenges and requirements, etc., and details the requirements and elements of the production in which he was particularly interested.*

### TECHNICAL

**Set and props**

*A set which shows creativity and innovation and addresses the style of the production. Is well constructed.  
 Props which are in period, authentic in appearance and placed strategically e.g. furniture.*

There was a simple setting for this production and the peripheral structure was minimal so that it could serve as the backdrop to all the scenes. The furniture was all well chosen and arranged across the stage to suggest areas within the club and the bar USC gave a focal point for The Court Club. As the stage at CHADS is fairly large, even with all the furniture, it did look quite bare. This may have been intentional to allow the focus to be on the actors but I felt that the set needed to be more compact to help create the right atmosphere. The tables and chairs were well arranged and we could see clearly that this was a club but the script describes Jack entering the *'warm glow of the Court Club'* and here the expanse of stage was rather plain making it more difficult to create a club ambience. The initial injection of smoke helped to suggest the smoky atmosphere of Ruth's world but maybe a smaller, more intimate setting was needed to really create the nightclub ambience for The Court Club. Similarly, 'The Little Club' introduced in Act I sc.8 is described in the script with lines such as *'can't swing a cat but it swings'* and *'ten gents up there makes it a party'*. It was difficult to communicate the atmosphere of a little club using the whole stage, and pushing the furniture US didn't really serve the purpose. So maybe a small area dedicated to these scenes would have given the audience more of a feel of an intimate club. The funeral scene worked well CS and here the space was appropriate, giving the scene an exposed and chilly tone. The prison looked suitably empty and isolated CS and Jack's home for the start of Act II worked really well in the tight space DSL.

Props were good and helped to suggest the period. The suitcase, newspaper, record player and selection of records looked right, the bar was stocked with a good selection of bottles and Sylvia's hangover cure was nicely done. Maybe there could have been some debris for Act I sc.4

	<p>for the morning after the '<i>small altercation</i>' but the contents of Ruth's pockets were plentiful and spilled nicely all round her feet at the end of Act I. Well done.</p>
<p><b>Lighting and Sound</b>  <i>Lighting and sound effects which contribute towards the dramatic potential, etc.</i></p>	<p><b><u>Lighting</u></b>  The technical effects were fundamental to this production in helping to create the atmosphere of the nightclubs as well as the other locations of the police station, funeral, prison and Jack's home. At the start of Act I the blue flashing lights off stage SR accompanied the frenzied sound effects appropriately and the dim spot on Ruth gave a nice initial focus to this central character. The subsequent intensity of the light transformed the stage to the stark questioning scene at the police station and this was achieved with good timing and clean execution. The camera flashes that punctuated the play were well timed but I thought the significance of them was a little unclear. I wondered whether they could have been accompanied by projected photos of Ruth to indicate the press coverage of this case. It was difficult to create an intimate club atmosphere with the lighting as the acting area was so spacious but Paul certainly provided the stage with good coverage.  The mirror ball effect was very striking and transformed the stage completely and the shaft of light representing Ruth's final walk to the gallows created a chilling and effective stage picture.</p> <p><b><u>Projections</u></b>  The projections used in this production were well-judged and certainly helped the audience to identify the different locations throughout the evening. The projected snow for the funeral scene worked particularly well and the final scene was enhanced by the smooth transition of the projections from wardrobe to doors to noose. Special mention must go to the prison window projection which was excellent and added great atmosphere to this particular scene.</p> <p><b><u>Sound</u></b>  This was certainly a busy production for David and it was lovely to hear the fabulous choice of songs that provided a wonderful background to this story. The evocative crackle of the records and the sticking needle added just the right atmosphere to the first scene. The subsequent</p>

	<p>musical interludes were all very well timed and complemented the scene changes well. There were plenty of other sound effects; the gunshots and sirens created the turmoil of the crime scene, the door buzzer was suitably persistent and the prison scene was introduced by an appropriate collection of keys and prison door effects to set the scene clearly for the audience. There were some unexpected gunshots during Act I sc.8 and they were exceptionally loud detracting somewhat from the dialogue between Jack and Sylvia. The crowd noises in Act II sc.6 sounded credible and the sound of the gallows drop added to the awfulness of Ruth's final scene.</p>
<p><b>Costumes</b>  <i>Costumes which are in of the period, well fitting, colour co-ordinated and enhance characterisation.</i></p>	<p>There were some lovely costumes in this production and they reflected the period well. Ruth's pencil skirt and white blouse looked right and with the shaped glasses and headscarf Lesley-Ann was transformed. Her full dress contrasted nicely with the earlier more formal look. The prison outfit was suitably plain and stood out well against the glamour of some of the other costumes. Sylvia looked stylish in her pencil skirt with the red of the top and earrings adding a touch of glamour. Vickie's dress for Act I sc. 8 was beautiful and she wore it with style, reflecting the prosperous circles in which she was now moving. Doris's wrap over apron and cardigan looked great and immediately conveyed her position in the club, her contrast to the other girls and her character. Maybe I was just too far away to see properly but I didn't notice any seamed nylons which would have been a feature of the girls' outfits. Overall the costume added nicely to the feel of the production.</p>
<p><b>Makeup and hair</b>  <i>Make hair and wigs which are in period and appropriate to the production (including size of venue) and assist in developing the character.</i></p>	<p>The wigs certainly helped to create the period for this play and in addition helped to establish the characters. Sylvia's red wig looked stylish but nonsense. Ruth's blonde curls were right for the character but I thought the wig itself was either a little too full at the front or worn a bit too far forward as it did obscure Lesley-Ann's eyes when she tilted her head. I loved Vickie's cropped wig which was perfect for the character and Eilidh suited it well. Make-up was appropriate and the bruising on Ruth's body looked very effective.</p>

## **DIRECTION**

*Detailed study/knowledge and interpretation of the text;  
progressing the author's intent with creativity and sensitivity.*

*Using theatrical dynamics to communicate with the audience.*

*Appropriate delivery of the text using timing and rhythm.*

*Settings with regard to focus, pace and groupings.*

*Movement which is appropriate to the period and style of  
production.*

*Creating atmosphere and mood to develop the full dramatic impact.*

### **Direction – David Quaife**

This is a demanding play from every perspective and bringing together all the elements was a challenging task. There is so much responsibility in portraying real people and their real stories and David had clearly done his research and looked into the background of this case and the lives of the people involved. Ruth Ellis is the focal character of the play but those around her certainly influenced her life and David and his cast did well to recreate their story.

This play embraces a series of relatively short but affecting scenes to tell the story, all brought to an interconnected whole by Jack Gale's inspection. David had worked this element into the production very well and the constant presence of Jack, whether directly in the scene or watching from the USR corner table, was a continual reminder that this piece is an investigation. Occasionally the scenes seemed a little disconnected and the moments in between scenes needed to be slicker and more meaningful to maintain the momentum. I know the play itself is written with scenes that abruptly move forward in time, and this can be difficult to communicate to the audience. The exception to this was the transition between Act II sc. 3 and sc.4 where the moves, the music and lighting change all came together fluently for a smooth evolution from the seemingly unrelated seductive dance to the miscarriage scene.

I have already commented on the expanse of stage space and the possibility of a more compact setting to create the ambience and I don't want to repeat myself here but this inevitably had an effect on the direction, the plotting and the atmosphere of the play. David's plotting was generally sound and the moves made sense and looked natural. The issue was the space. The actors seemed to somehow get lost in the expanse of stage and this made it difficult for them to create the required intimacy of some of the scenes. I have already discussed the want of atmosphere in the clubs but there were other examples such as Act II sc.4 where we saw Ruth and Doris alone CS. Although this was a good scene it felt rather remote and inaccessible and once again it might have worked better in a smaller, more compact and intimate setting. In contrast to this, placing Jack DSL for the start of Act II worked really well and we got the sense of an interesting, intimate space in Jack's home - simple but effective.

David used a couple of the club tables for individual scenes and I liked the use of the USL table for Jack's scrutiny of the fragmentary story. The encounters between Jack and Sylvia were played out nicely DSL with good use of the table

as well as the main space. David's use of the fourth wall was also well judged, not only during the Jack/Sylvia scenes but Sylvia's calling for the taxi and Jack's introductory speech which immediately drew the audience in to the action. The Ruth/Sylvia/Doris scene in Act I sc.7 felt quite static, although the different levels worked well. I wondered why Doris would put the tray of tea on the floor when there was a table right next to her. I'm sure having the tray on the table would have also opened up some extra natural moves for the scene, for Doris at least.

The pace within the scenes was generally good; the actors were strong on their lines and they worked well together. Occasionally, the emotional delivery needed reigning in so that we could experience the rise and fall of the emotion rather than just moments of shouted dialogue. The argument between Ruth and Doris was an example of this. The dialogue consists of short fiery lines and Lesley-Ann and Jane were putting in plenty of energy – I think it just needed more variation of volume, urgency and intensity. There was excellent pace in the court scene in Act II sc.6 and the questioning and responses were quick and forceful.

The penultimate scene of the play was well structured and David had used all his technical support to create Ruth's final moments. His use of space was dramatic and the final walk towards the place of execution was well staged and well paced.

Act II sc.7, the final scene of the play, is such an important scene to show the other characters' lives continuing without Ruth but nevertheless still touched by her loss. I felt this scene was a little rushed and didn't really convey the necessary emotion for the final moments of this play. The presence of Jack in the club again, the poignant return of the spectacles, every move and piece of business needed to be charged with emotion to make sense of this scene.

On the whole, this was a very challenging piece and David and his cast and crew created some affecting scenes in the life of Ruth Ellis to communicate her story. Well done.

## ACTORS

*Characterisation which is believable shows flair, originality and understanding.*

*Vocal technique which is appropriate to the play and is delivered with understanding and a good technique.*

*Movement which is in character and in period and incorporating movement to deliver pace.*

*Supporting ones fellow actor unselfishly and enhancing his performance.*

*Using all available theatrical skills to make a noticeable contribution to the play.*

*(Include individual adjudications for each actor.)*

### **Ruth Ellis – Lesley-Ann Birley**

Lesley-Ann had such a challenge with this role, not only to create the real person of Ruth Ellis on stage but to communicate her reasons for how she lived and how she died. Her first scene, dressing DSR, was well paced and Lesley-Ann looked in full control of her movements leading up to the gunshots. This set the standard for what was to be a multifaceted and nicely developed performance.

Physically, Lesley-Ann did really well. Her command of the stage was good and she adjusted her physical performance to the numerous changes of mood essential for this role. Her composure and confidence was evident from the start and she showed us a young woman who was comfortable with her own physicality. We saw the relaxed and exuberant side of Ruth in her clowning around with Vickie and yet Lesley-Ann effortlessly assumed the necessary poise for her sultry dance in Act II sc.3. She portrayed the vulnerability of Ruth in scenes such as her painful entrance from the hospital in Act I sc.6 and the miscarriage scene which was emotionally raw. Lesley-Ann did well to communicate Ruth's pain and distress here through a series of anguished cries, handling this scene well both physically and vocally.

The final scene of Act I was expressive and Lesley-Ann really got under the skin of the character here, conveying Ruth's delicate mental state through her rapid nervous twitching and wild movements. Her handling of Ruth's reactions to the more serious moments in the story was subtle but effective. She remained in control and suitably disinterested during the interrogation scene and her visible shaking in court added to the distress of the inevitable conclusion.

Vocally, Lesley-Ann gave a solid performance. David's notes in the programme refer to the tape recording of Ruth's voice being '*very forced upper class, trying to be posh.*' Perhaps Lesley-Ann's delivery sounded a little too refined and I wondered whether she could have forced her accent to show that Ruth was making a big effort '*to be posh*' but not quite succeeding and thereby betraying her roots. The exuberant scene with Vickie was well judged and we heard Ruth's natural high-spirits come through here. The emotional scenes were handled well. The row with Doris in Act II sc.4 had lots of energy and Lesley-Ann gave her dialogue plenty of attack. Occasionally she lost a bit of clarity when she was shouting and there needed to be a little more vocal control in the frenzied moments – a very difficult balance to strike when the character herself is out of control.

Lesley-Ann's final scene was played with great composure and she showed Ruth's strength of character and her determination to face her fate with

dignity. On the whole this was a solid performance of a very demanding role and Lesley-Ann portrayed a broad range of emotions as the scenes quickly moved from one episode of Ruth's life to another. Well done.

### **Sylvia Shaw – Heather Bowman**

Heather played this role with all the world-weariness of a woman who had seen it all, done it all and come through it all in one piece. She conveyed the fact that nothing surprised Sylvia and she adopted a hard-faced, down-to-earth attitude to her work and to her girls. Heather had a good accent and it complemented her dialogue nicely. Her first scene with Jack was played with an unemotional bluntness and Heather showed Sylvia's ability to provoke Jack with her nonchalant one-liners. Later lines such as '*And he'd know, being a doctor*' were delivered with a perfectly judged hint of an aside to bring out the humour. Heather's hangover was heartfelt and her physical performance here worked really well. The sluggish entrance and the shivery '*ughhh*' as she drank the hangover cure were very well judged. We saw the cold, almost unforgiving side of this character through Heather's fixed and determined attitude in the funeral scene and she always made Sylvia look cool, in control and just a little detached. This paved the way nicely for her tender moment in the prison when the ice ultimately broke as she said her emotional goodbye to Ruth. This was a thoughtful characterisation from Heather. Well done.

### **Valerie Mewes/Vickie Martin – Eilidh Pollard**

This was a confident performance from Eilidh and she brought a breath of fresh energy to the stage on her first entrance. She had a good stage presence, a lovely smile for this role and she helped to lighten the play with her bright and positive character. Eilidh wore the fashions very well and gave the impression of a girl who wanted the high life. Her movements were confident and she made good use of the space with her flouncing exit in her final scene of Act I bringing her portrayal of Vickie to a strong end.

Eilidh and Lesley-Ann created a good friendship for their characters and worked well together in the lighter scenes showing the connection between the two girls. Eilidh was very confident on her lines and the pace of the courtroom scene in Act II was evidence of her excellent command of the dialogue.

Occasionally her delivery was a little sharp, such as the heated dialogue in Act I sc.9, and maybe a slightly lower vocal register would have helped her to maintain the control in her delivery. Nevertheless, she had a very clear voice for her other dialogue and her scene as the Judge was excellent.

This was a believable performance from Eilidh. Well done.

### **Doris Judd – Jane Wood**

Jane did well with this role creating a genuine and credible character rather than a stereotypical char. She had an easy stage presence, delivered her dialogue with assurance and bonded well with the other characters. I liked the fact that Jane showed Doris's dedication and support to the girls both vocally and physically. She had a good voice and expressed Doris's naivety and simplicity through her dialogue. She came across as such an enthusiastic worker and a supportive friend but never once strayed into caricature. Jane moved and gestured naturally and made the most of some of the comedy in her role, with a particularly lovely moment as she enthused over the ulcers in Act I. She looked suitably embarrassed during the awkward pauses in the



prison scene and delivered the nervous chatter well to cover the growing atmosphere between Ruth and Sylvia. This was a solid supporting role from Jane. Well done.

### **D.I. Jack Gale – Simon Darlington**

Far from being just a detective who asks questions, this is a challenging and multi-layered role. Simon had a good stage presence and always let the focal characters take centre stage. I liked this noble style, ever-present in the background but never detracting from the main action, showing Simon as a generous actor with the production as his priority rather than just his own performance.

Simon had a light and pleasant voice and his dialogue was always clear. I thought the initial speech and reading the statement could have been more effective with a flatter delivery rather than a storytelling tone but as the play moved on Simon's delivery proved to be varied. His irritation with Sylvia was communicated through Simon's forceful tone and he handled the questioning scenes well. I always find that it can be difficult to maintain variety when asking a series of questions but Simon handled this element of the role skilfully.

Simon took good physical command of the stage when it was necessary. As well as the formal detective we also saw the more vulnerable side to his character when he was at home with his papers and his records. Simon also handled the scene changing moments quickly and efficiently. Jack Gale clearly has a history that is hinted at in the dialogue, and I wondered whether Simon might have drawn more from this. Maybe he could have been a little more hardened and shrewd to reflect his *'Nicking tarts on Old Compton Street'* days and his background of active service. He did however capture Jack's fascination with the case with credible coaxing of Ruth to tell more of her story. The final scene with Ruth was well played and we felt Jack's sadness and frustration at being unable to help her.

This was a solid and well handled performance from Simon. Well done.

**OVERALL ACHIEVEMENT (or CONCLUSION)**

*An excellent understanding of the author's intent. Direction which shows skill, originality, sensitivity and creativity using all the theatrical tools of pace, focus, delivery, timing and rhythm.*

*Talented actors creating highly effective dramatic impact.*

*Evidence of teamwork and unselfish ensemble playing.*

*Actors who interact and react and a production team who use all resources to create atmosphere and mood.*

David obviously had a supportive team around him for this production and they all worked well to realise his vision. With a committed cast who had a very good grasp of the dialogue we witnessed scenes with pace and appropriate emotion. Characterisations were good and the cast had clearly worked hard to create their individual characters. Maybe the settings could have been more intimate and atmospheric but the technical support was well designed and well executed, and the wardrobe added nicely to the presentation. Well done to everyone involved.  
Thank you to David for looking after me and I look forward to my next visit to CHADS.

<b>Adjudicator (print)</b>	Carmel Bird
<b>Date</b>	9 <sup>th</sup> February 2019